Association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy in 184 countries: A retrospective longitudinal study

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# Abstract

**Background:**

**Methods:**

**Results:**

**Conclusion:**

1. **Introduction**

Life expectancy is defined as the average number of years that a person will live from birth based on measures such as birth year, gender, and current age. This calculation assumes that mortality rates will remain the same as time progresses. The greatest factors that impact life expectancy overall include income, quality of public health, medical care, and diet. (Statista. (2018). Life expectancy by continent 2018 | Statistic. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270861/life-expectancy-by-continent/>) Due to increasing rates of economic growth and access to health care coverage, life expectancy at birth and healthy life expectancy have significantly risen worldwide [[1](#_bookmark4),2[].](#_bookmark5) However, life expectancy disparities still exist across the world due to variations in income level and educational attainment.[[3](#_bookmark6)]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the average life expectancy globally in 2016 was 72 years of age. Global life expectancy ranged from 61.2 years in the African Region to 77.5 years in the European Region, a ratio of 1.3 between the regions. (WHO. (2018). Life expectancy. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/gho/mortality\_burden\_disease/life\_tables/situation\_trends/en/)

**NEED some reference and statistics on unevenly distributed life expectancy in the world.**

Employment, education, diet, quality of life, environmental conditions, government health expenditure, and income have been reported as the main risk factors that have significant effects on life expectancy in both developed and developing countries [[4](#_bookmark7)–[9](#_bookmark8)]. Among these risk factors, poverty (income level) is the primary cause of ill-health and decreased life expectancy due to its negative effect on environmental sustainability and insufficient access to health care services [[10](#_bookmark9)–[12](#_bookmark10)]. Globally, approximately 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty, and 2.7 billion live in moderate poverty [[13](#_bookmark11)]. In order to decrease share of out-of-pocket spending and ensure health care access to economically disadvantaged populations, health insurance coverage and prepayment schemes have been widely established in health care systems around the world [[14](#_bookmark12)]. In developing countries, compulsory health insurance has been successfully implemented u as a tool for concentrating resources in the health sector and providing needed medical service to low-income households [[15](#_bookmark13)–[19](#_bookmark14)].

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*Preprint submitted to Global Health Research and Policy - Thematic Series: Universal Health Coverage April 8, 2019*

There is growing attention on compulsory health insurance because it has been proven as an effective way to achieve Universal Health Coverage. [[14](#_bookmark12)]. Compulsory health insurance, also known as the Bismarck Sickness Insurance, was first introduced in Germany in 1883. It guaranteed that all workers and their families had access to health services [[20](#_bookmark15)]. Australia (1888), Hungary (1891), England (1911), and Japan (1922) respectively all later adopted national compulsory health insurance systems as well [[20](#_bookmark15)]. Most countries in the world either use national compulsory insurance plans or a similar type of health care system[[21](#_bookmark16)]. Health care spending accounts for the use of health care services and public health services. As a result, there is a clear trend in the relationship between compulsory health insurance and the life expectancy in a country. As a country’s health expenditure increases, the life expectancy also increases. (Roser, M., Nolan, B., Thewissen, S., Mark, C., Ferguson, T., Freedman, A., . . . Reddy, S. (2016). The link between health spending and life expectancy: The US is an outlier. Retrieved from https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/the-link-between-health-spending-and-life-expectancy-the-us-is-an-outlier)**NEED some reference on** **compulsory health insurance and life expectancy.**. However, to the best of our ­­knowledge, the exploration of the long-term impact of compulsory health insurance on life expectancy is limited. This includes looking at the association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy in different countries. The strength and changes related to this association have not been systematically investigated and compared.

This study addressed the main gaps that exist in previous literature on the association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy among different countries over time. Using country-level longitudinal data from years 2000 to 2016, the purpose of this study was to examine the association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy and to also explore the different patterns of this association in low, low-mid, up-mid, and high-income countries respectively.

# Methods

* 1. *Data source*

The country level data that was used for this study was extracted from the Global Health Expenditure Database [[22](#_bookmark17)]. This database is sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and provides health expenditure data on 190 countries from years 2000 to 2016. The current health expenditure (CHE) can be decomposed into several variables: domestic government health expenditure, private health expenditure, and percentage of out-of-pocket (OOP) payment; financing arrangements can be decomposed into the variables compulsory financing arrangements, government financing arrangements, compulsory health insurance, household OOP payment as a percent of CHE; CHE and government health expenditure as a percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

In addition to looking at specific decomposed variables for health expenditure and financing arrangements, we looked at the countries in the World Bank Open Data and extracted life expectancy, GDP, and population data from years 2000 to 2016 [[23](#_bookmark18)]. Both databases are publicly available, with downloadable

comma-separated values or Microsoft Excel files provided on the WHO website. The two databases were then merged according to two common keys, country name and year in order to perform our analyses.

* 1. *Variable selection*

The outcome variable, life expectancy at birth in a specific year, was assessed for each country. It reflected the overall mortality rate of all age groups in a given year by country. Life expectancy is one of the most widely used measures of mortality and burden of disease in previous literature [[2](#_bookmark5),[24–](#_bookmark19)[26].](#_bookmark20)

We included three key sets of explanatory variables to predict life expectancy in the 184 countries over time. Country level general characteristics included population (in millions), year (2000 to 2015), and GDP (in billions). The GDP data were reported in constant 2010 prices, which were adjusted for the effects of price inflation [[27](#_bookmark21)]. Current health expenditure (CHE) and government health expenditure (GGHE-D) as percent of GDP were used to account for investment in healthcare for a given country. Compulsory financing arrangements and compulsory health insurance as percent of the CHE were also included to account for any differences in the source of financing arrangements. Private health expenditure and OOP payment as percent of the CHE were two sources of healthcare expenditure. These percents fell in the range of 0 to 100. We excluded variables that could cause multicollinearity in our statistical models, which was determined by the variance inflation factor.

The income group of a country was classified into four groups based on the World Bank’s classification criterion for that fiscal year: low, low-mid, up-mid, and high [[28](#_bookmark22)]. This income classification for each country is based on the national income per person in a year and can vary by year [[28](#_bookmark22)].

* 1. *Statistical Analyses*

Observations with missing data in either the dependent variable or any of the explanatory variables were excluded, resulting in a total of 2,975 complete observations (91% of the original data) from 184 countries. Since only 166 of the 184 countries (90.2%) had complete data in the seventeen-year period (2000 to 2016), our empirical analysis relied on unbalanced country-level panel data. Among the 184 sample countries, there were 49 in the African Region, 35 in the American Region, 19 in the South-East Asia Region, 51 in the European Region, 10 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and 23 in the Western Pacific Region [[29](#_bookmark23)].

We estimated the association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy among the 184 countries using an ordinary least square model that accounted for all the covariates and time trend

Table 1: Characteristics of the 184 countries by income group, 2000 - 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Low-Mid | Up-Mid | High |
| N | 459 | 830 | 826 | 860 |
| Life Expectancy | 56.65 (5.59) | 65.45 (7.26) | 71.22 (5.71) | 77.82 (3.35) |
| Current health expenditure as percent of GDP | 6.15 (2.46) | 5.36 (2.35) | 5.74 (2.15) | 7.21 (2.70) |
| Government Health Expenditure as percent of GDP | 1.40 (0.74) | 2.26 (1.66) | 3.18 (1.64) | 5.09 (2.15) |
| Private health expenditure as percent CHE | 49.91 (18.30) | 47.83 (22.12) | 42.65 (17.53) | 29.39 (12.74) |
| Out-of-pocket payment as percent of CHE | 44.73 (18.82) | 43.37 (21.81) | 35.00 (17.77) | 22.00 (10.76) |
| Compulsory financing arrangements as percent of CHE | 36.18 (14.99) | 46.49 (21.04) | 55.40 (17.48) | 66.01 (20.50) |
| Compulsory health insurance as percent of CHE | 1.35 (2.53) | 6.58 (9.78) | 18.06 (22.52) | 23.53 (29.31) |
| Population (millions) | 17.71 (19.03) | 54.24 (172.60) | 48.99 (188.88) | 22.34 (47.24) |
| GDP | 0.90 (0.86) | 8.54 (24.51) | 28.61 (89.20) | 86.51 (223.73) |

*Note:*

GDP: Gross Domestic Product; CHE: Current Health Expenditure

fixed-effects. Since high- and low-income countries can be characterized by different patterns of life expectancy and health financing schemes, we conducted stratified analyses among the four income category countries to allow for potentially different patterns of association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy among the 184 countries. Our main hypothesis was that compulsory health insurance was positively associated with life expectancy.

We reported point and interval estimates (95% confidence intervals, 95% CI), as well as the significance of all independent variables. A p-value less than 0.05 was viewed as statistically significant. All data cleaning, visualization, statistical modelling, and reporting were performed using statistical computing and graphics environment R, version 3.5.3 [[30](#_bookmark24)]. In an effort to promote reproducible research, we created a public GitHub repository to store all the data and R code we used to write this paper. Interested readers can find them at h[ttps://github.com/caimiao0714/GHRP-UHC.](https://github.com/caimiao0714/GHRP-UHC)

# Results

* 1. *Characteristics of the countries by income group*

Table 1 presents averages and standard deviations (in parentheses) for the different characteristics of the 184 countries stratified by income group. High-income countries had the highest average life expectancy (77.82 years), followed by up-mid (71.22 years), low-mid (65.45 years), and low-income countries (56.65 years). Figure 1 shows the trends of life expectancy in the 184 countries over the seventeen-year period, with each line representing a country and each color an income category. The life expectancy in the studied countries were generally linear with a clear increase from 2000 to 2016. Consistent with Table 1 results[,](#_bookmark0) the most significant pattern in the plot was that life expectancy was strongly related to income group: the high-income countries had the highest life expectancy, which

80

Income group Low Low−Mid Up−Mid High

70

Life expectancy in each country

60

50

40

2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

Year

Figure 1: Life expectancy in 184 countries stratified by country income group, 2000 - 2016

increased from about 77 in 2000 to around 80 years old in 2016; the low-income countries generally had the lowest life expectancy, which increased from around 50 to about 58 years old. The gap of life expectancy between high- and low-income countries narrowed from 2000 to 2016. It was also to be noted that the variance of life expectancy in low and low-mid income countries were much higher than that in up-mid and high-income countries.

Regarding healthcare expenditure, it appeared that lower income countries had less government health expenditure as percent of GDP, more private health expenditure, and OOP payments as percent of GDP, compared to higher income countries. In terms of financing arrangement, higher income countries had a higher percent of compulsory financing arrangements and compulsory health insurance as percent of current health expenditure. Compared to low-mid and up-mid income countries, high- and low-income countries had smaller populations but more current health expenditure as percent of GDP.

* 1. *Potential life expectancy gain by compulsory health insurance*

Table 2: OLS model predicting life expectancy in 184 countries, 2000 - 2016

Life expectancy

Current health expenditure as percent of GDP 0.162∗ (0.026, 0.298)

Government health expenditure as percent of GDP 0.482∗∗∗

(0.263, 0.702)

Private health expenditure as percent CHE

( *−*0.154∗∗∗

Out-of-pocket payment as percent of CHE

0.186, 0.122)

0.174∗∗∗ (0.146, 0.201)

*− −*

Compulsory financing arrangements as percent of CHE 0.0003

*−*

Compulsory health insurance as percent of CHE

( 0.016, 0.017)

0.035∗∗∗ (0.025, 0.045)

Population (millions) 0.002∗∗

(0.001, 0.004)

GDP 0.001

*−*

Year

Low income country

( 0.0003, 0.003)

0.301∗∗∗ (0.263, 0.339)

( *−*19.084∗∗∗

Low to middle income country

*−*19.889, *−*18.280)

( *−*10.936∗∗∗

Up to middle income country

*−*11.539, *−*10.334)

( *−*5.414∗∗∗

Constant

*−*5.945, *−*4.882)

( *−*529.862∗∗∗

605.762, 453.961)

*− −*

*N* 2,975

R2 0.695

Adjusted R2 0.694

∗p *<* .05; ∗∗p *<* .01; ∗∗∗p *<* .001 GDP: Gross Domestic Product CHE: Current Health Expenditure

Table 2 presents the overall relationship between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy. Controlling for other covariates, there was a one percent increase in compulsory health insurance as percent of CHE that was associated with a 0.035 year (95% CI: [0.025, 0.045]) increase in overall life expectancy. The CHE and GGHE-D as percent of GDP were positively associated with life expectancy. The countries with higher OOP as percent of CHE and lower private health expenditure as percent CHE had higher life expectancies. Compulsory financing arrangements as percent of CHE did not appear to be a significant predictor. In addition, a larger population size was associated with a higher life expectancy, although the

coefficient was small. Compared to high-income countries, the life expectancy in low-income as well as the low to middle income and middle-income countries was significantly lower. It was worth noting that the effect size for low-income countries (*β* = *−*19*.*084) was much larger than the low to middle-income (*β* = *−*10*.*936) and middle-income countries (*β* = *−*5*.*414), after controlling for potential covariates.

* 1. *Potential life expectancy gain by compulsory health insurance in different income groups*

Table 3 presents the relationship between compulsory health insurance as percent of CHE and life expectancy in the different countries by income group. The percent of compulsory health insurance was positively associated with life expectancy among low (*β* = 0*.*224, 95% CI: [0.055, 0.392]), low-mid (*β* = 0*.*243, 95% CI: [0.195, 0.291]), and up-mid income (*β* = 0*.*061, 95% CI: [0.045, 0.078]) countries. However, this association was found negative among high-income countries (*β* = *−*0*.*011, 95% CI: [-0.018, 0.005]), although the effect size was very small.

The effects of predictors on life expectancy varied across income groups. CHE as percent of GDP was found to be positively correlated with life expectancy in the up-mid income countries. However, this correlation was negative in high-income countries. Similarly, the effect of GGHE-D as percent of GDP on life expectancy changed from negative in up-mid countries to positive in high-income countries. Private Health Expenditure as percent CHE was positively associated with life expectancy among low- and high-income countries but was negatively associated with life expectancy among low-mid and up-mid income countries. For low- and high-income countries, OOP as percent of CHE had negative effects on life expectancy. However, the effect of OOP as percent of CHE on life expectancy was positive among low-mid and up-mid income countries.

8

Table 3: OLS model predicting life expectany, 2000 - 2016, stratifeid by country income categories,

Life expectancy

Low Low-mid Up-mid High

Model 1 Model 2 Model 3 Model 4 Current Health Expenditure as percent of GDP 0*.*155 0*.*157 1*.*022∗∗∗ 0*.*719∗∗∗

*− −*

(-0.377*,*0.067) (-0.122*,*0.436) (0.595*,*1.448) (-1.039*,*-0.399)

Government Health Expenditure as percent of GDP 0*.*394 0*.*099 0*.*890∗ 1*.*975∗∗∗

*− −*

(-1.189*,*0.402) (-0.391*,*0.590) (-1.597*,*-0.183) (1.554*,*2.397)

Private Health Expenditure as percent CHE 0*.*174∗∗∗ 0*.*373∗∗∗ 0*.*137∗∗∗ 0*.*116∗∗∗

*− −*

(0.087*,*0.262) (-0.469*,*-0.277) (-0.215*,*-0.059) (0.072*,*0.159)

Out-of-pocket payment as percent of CHE 0*.*172∗∗∗ 0*.*435∗∗∗ 0*.*239∗∗∗ 0*.*043∗

*− −*

(-0.254*,*-0.090) (0.349*,*0.520) (0.201*,*0.277) (-0.076*,*-0.010)

Compulsory Financing Arrangements as percent of CHE 0*.*024 0*.*054 0*.*148∗∗∗ 0*.*002

*−*

(-0.075*,*0.026) (-0.008*,*0.116) (0.087*,*0.210) (-0.009*,*0.012)

Compulsory health insurance as percent of CHE 0*.*224∗∗ 0*.*243∗∗∗ 0*.*061∗∗∗ 0*.*011∗∗∗

*−*

(0.055*,*0.392) (0.195*,*0.291) (0.045*,*0.078) (-0.018*,*-0.005)

Population (millions) 0*.*056∗ 0*.*005 0*.*003 0*.*012

*− −*

(-0.100*,*-0.012) (-0.012*,*0.002) (-0.001*,*0.007) (-0.009*,*0.032)

GDP 2*.*435∗∗∗ 0*.*060∗ 0*.*001 0*.*003

*−*

(1.427*,*3.444) (0.011*,*0.109) (-0.007*,*0.009) (-0.007*,*0.002)

Year 0*.*506∗∗∗ 0*.*289∗∗∗ 0*.*225∗∗∗ 0*.*158∗∗∗ (0.409*,*0.602) (0.200*,*0.378) (0.160*,*0.290) (0.122*,*0.195)

Constant 958*.*790∗∗∗ 521*.*271∗∗∗ 395*.*563∗∗∗ 247*.*217∗∗∗

*− − − −*

(-1,152.821*,*-764.759) (-699.343*,*-343.198) (-525.258*,*-265.868) (-319.848*,*-174.585)

*N* 459 830 826 860

R2 0.391 0.304 0.385 0.465

Adjusted R2 0.379 0.296 0.378 0.460

∗p *<* .05; ∗∗p *<* .01; ∗∗∗p *<* .001

# Discussion

In this study, we explored the association between compulsory health insurance and life expectancy in 184 countries over a 17-year period. Our regression models revealed that compulsory health insurance was significantly associated with life expectancy, after adjusting for country level characteristics, health expenditure, and other health financing arrangements.

# Acknowledgements

We thank the WHO and the World Bank for making the data used in this study publicly available for researchers.

# Funding

None.

# Availability of data and materials

All data and associated R code are public available at the GitHub repository caimiao0714/GHRP-UHC, which can be accessed ath[ttps://github.com/caimiao0714/GHRP-UHC.](https://github.com/caimiao0714/GHRP-UHC)

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